

## XV.

THE INDIANS IN ARMENIA, 130 B.C.—300 A.D.<sup>1</sup>

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THE existence of an ancient Indian colony in Armenia is well known to Armenian scholars, but Indianists have paid little attention to it. We owe our knowledge of it to Zenob, a Syrian, and a native of Glak (Klag), which Mr. Ellis suggests may be the Armenian equivalent of Kerak. Zenob became an ecclesiastic in an unknown town of Cappadocia called Nystra, and was the companion of St. Gregory the Illuminator on an idol-smashing tour through Armenia, about the year 304 A.D. By St. Gregory's command he wrote an account of this expedition to his Cappadocian brethren, and in it he gives a lively account of the Illuminator's little war with the Indian idolaters of Tarôn (Darôn). Zenob's history, composed originally in Syriac, has come down to us in an Armenian version, which has suffered from revision. It has been twice translated into French, and part of it into English. Zenob's work has the charm and freshness of a contemporary narrative, and throws a good deal of light on the early history of monachism and the worship of relics. He was well

<sup>1</sup> Very various methods are in use for the transliteration of Armenian texts. Mr. A. G. Ellis has very kindly gone over this paper, and supplied me with the transliteration of the proper names in accordance with the system in use at the British Museum; the transliterations of Prudhomme and Avdall are occasionally added in parentheses. I have to thank Messrs. Grierson and Rhys Davids for suggestions regarding Prakrit and Pali forms; and Mr. W. Williams for the following bibliography: J. Avdall, J.A.S.B., vol. v, 1836, p. 331 ff.; E. Prudhomme, "Histoire de Darôn par Zenob de Klag" (*Journ. Asiatique*, 1863, p. 401 ff.); V. Langlois, "Collection des Historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie," Paris, 1867, tome i, p. 336 ff.; M. J. Seth, "History of the Armenians in India," 1897; Emin, "Recherches sur le Paganisme Arménien," Paris, 1864, pp. 30-31; a passing reference by Lassen, Z. f. d. Kunde des Morgenlandes, Bd. i, p. 233. There are also references in Ritter's "Erdkunde" and some other works on Armenia.

acquainted with the Indians he mentions, as he was for twenty years Abbot of the Convent of the Nine Springs, founded by St. Gregory on the site of the Indian temple. The convent became one of the most famous in Armenia, and was popularly known from the time of Zenob as the convent of Glak.

Zenob's story is briefly this. Two Indian chiefs, Gisanê (Kisanê) and Demetr (Témétr), rebelling unsuccessfully against the king Dinaskhé (Dinaskey), fled westwards with their clan and found shelter with Vaļarshak, or Valarsaces, the first Arsacide monarch of Armenia (149–127 B.C.). Valarsaces gave them the canton of Tarôn<sup>1</sup> for a residence, and there they founded the town of Vishap or the Dragon. In the neighbouring town of Ashtishat, the pantheon of all the gods of Armenia, they set up replicas of the idols they had worshipped in India.<sup>2</sup> Fifteen years later the king of Armenia put Gisanê and Demetr to death, but their sons Kouar (Guëvar'), Meļtes (Meghtes), and Hořian continued to hold the canton of Tarôn, and divided the land among them. They founded three villages which were named after them, Kouarḱh, Meļtes, and Hořianḱh. They also erected two

<sup>1</sup> Tarôn was a district of hills and plains on the upper Euphrates, lying westward of Lake Van. It was half Syrian in character, and adjoined the country afterwards occupied by the Mamikonians, a famous Chinese family who fled to Armenia in the early part of the third century A.D. The district is now known, Mr. Ellis tells me, as the district of Moush, and was the scene of some of the recent Armenian massacres. Moush is mentioned by Zenob, but it was not then the chief town of the district.

<sup>2</sup> I agree with Avdall and Lassen that these idols were named Gisanê and Demetr. But Emin says: "Nous trouvons ces efforts d'assimilation complètement inutiles par la simple raison qu'il est nullement question dans le récit de Zenob de deux divinités indiennes s'appelant Kisané et Temedr. Ces deux noms n'étaient que ceux des deux pères, premiers émigrants de l'Inde. Après qu'ils furent tués sur l'ordre du roi d'Arménie les fils transportèrent les idoles de leurs héréditaires d'Achichat sur le mont Karké, et depuis lors ces idoles furent connues des habitants du pays de Darôn sous une dénomination générale des dieux pères Kisané et Temedr" ("Recherches sur le Paganisme Arménien," pp. 30–31). But Zenob, after describing the idols of Gisanê and Demetr and the fate of the idolaters, goes on to say: "Voici du reste l'origine des idoles existant en ces lieux [i.e. of Gisanê and Demetr]. Etant venus à Aschdischad, ils y érigèrent ces idoles sous le nom de celles qu'ils adoraient dans l'Inde." In the next paragraph he says that "Guëvar' Méghdès et Hořian se rendirent sur la mont K'arkê. Ils y érigèrent deux idoles, l'une sous le nom de Kiçanê, l'autre sous celui de Témétr," etc. (J.A., 1863, pp. 454–455). There is nowhere mention of any others than these two, or of any idols left at Ashtishat. I have not seen Emin's book, and have to thank Mr. Williams for the extract.

temples to their gods Gisanê and Demetr on Kharkhê, a grassy hill with woods and springs, which overlooked the Euphrates; and these temples became the sacred seat and the rallying point of the clan. The descendants of Kouar, Meltes, and Horian were the priests of the idols, and twelve villages were assigned for the maintenance of the temple service. We hear nothing more of these Indians until St. Gregory appeared with 300 men to overturn their faith. The people flew to arms, and the first outbreak of the popular fury obliged St. Gregory to take refuge in a friendly castle. Both sides received reinforcements, desperate battles were fought, and over a thousand men fell. Artzan,<sup>1</sup> the chief priest, and his son Demetr were slain in combat, having exhibited a courage worthy of heroes. The Indians were overpowered, but they still implored that their idols might be spared. Six priests fell at the temple door, another died under torture without revealing the treasury of Demetr. The Christians then proceeded to break up the copper statues of the gods, which were 12 and 15 cubits high. The temples were razed to the ground, and on the site of Demetr's temple St. Gregory erected a church, while a wooden cross marked the place where Gisanê's idol had stood. More than 5,000 idolaters submitted to baptism, and 438 persons, the sons of priests, or temple servants, who remained obdurate, had their heads shaved and were transported to Phaitakaran, near the shores of the Caspian.<sup>2</sup>

Zenob gives us various details about these Indians. They were black, ugly, and long-haired ("noirs, chevelus, et difformes"). The long hair was a sacred badge. Gisanê was represented with long hair, his worshippers all wore it long, and Zenob tells us that even after their conversion the Indians secretly kept to their former cult and made their

<sup>1</sup> Artzan = idol or statue. Armenians, and even Armenian Christians, used it sometimes as a personal name. Mr. Ellis has pointed out to me an instance in Moses of Khorene.

<sup>2</sup> Phaitakaran is the territory inclosed by the junction of the Kûr and the Ceras, and is the Bailagân of the Arab geographers. No European traveller appears to have visited its ruins.—*Mr. Ellis's note.*

children wear long hair. The priests were of the lineage of the chiefs, and perhaps claimed to be descended from the gods. They can, therefore, have had no Brahmans. They must have abandoned, in great part at least, their native speech, since they used proper names like Artzan; but their features were markedly different from their neighbours. They remained a separate people, although their chiefs had become connected in some way, probably by marriage, with the neighbouring chief of Hashtiankh.

From these certain conclusions may be drawn. (1) These Indians were an aboriginal tribe, i.e. they were non-Aryans. Their black skins and ugly features, as well as the absence of Brahmans, prove that. (2) They wandered to Armenia in the reign of Valarsaces, 149–127 B.C. This is the period when the Śakas were invading and Greek princelings harrying Kabul, the North-Western Punjab, and the Indus Valley. It is reasonable to suppose that they fled in consequence of these troubles; and their flight to Armenia is paralleled by the subsequent flight of the Mamikonians from China. (3) They called their first town Vishap—the Armenian equivalent for Nagpur. They must, therefore, have been worshippers of the snake. The Punjab, Kashmir, and the Indus Valley are still strongholds of this worship. And as these Indians had no Brahmans, and the Brahmans were strong in the North-Western Punjab, it is probable, I think, that this tribe came from the Indus Valley.<sup>1</sup>

Can philology help us any farther? Dinaskhê and Hořian cannot be identified—Mr. Ellis says that the termination *khê* “is very largely used in forming names of territories or tribes”—and it is therefore possible that Dinaskhê represents, not the proper name of a king, but the ruler of a tribe of somewhat similar name.<sup>2</sup> Kouar is probably the Prakrit

<sup>1</sup> Seth's conjecture that they came from Kanauj is not only unsupported by evidence, but is contrary to all probability. Kanauj was not at this time a place of importance, and the emigrations from it do not begin until eight or nine centuries later.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Grierson suggests some connection with the Śakas. I would rather suggest a connection with the last part of the word Μακεδονες—the Macedonians—the name by which the Bactrian Greeks were known.

Kuar, the Sanskrit and Pali Kumāra, a young prince. Meḷtes—Avdall's Meguti—may be a derivative from the Sanskrit *mahat*, 'great.' Kuar and Mahto are still honorific titles in daily use.

Demetr and Gisanê (Kisanê) are names common to gods and men. Demetr must be some compound of Mitra, perhaps Devamitra, but about Demetr we have no details. It is different with Gisanê. He had long hair, he struck his enemies with blindness and death, and his votaries worshipped him with their faces to the west. Lassen suggested long ago that Gisanê might be Krishna, and although the usual Prakrit (and Pali) form is Kanha, Kisina is admittedly a probable corruption, and occurs in names like Keśin and Kiśen. The similarity of sound is confirmed by the similarity of attributes. Krishna was the 'dark' god, the god of the underworld and of the setting sun, the peculiar god of Dvaraka, where the sun sets in the sea. He was identified with Dionysos by the Greeks, and he possesses the same attributes of love and dance and song and death—lord of the dark region where the germs of all things are quickened. A god who faces towards the west, and who inflicts blindness and death, is near akin to such a god. In after times the priests of the Sun-god of Multan protected their town by threatening to exhibit his idol; he, too, darted darkness and death. Both Demetr and Gisanê were probably forms of solar deities.

But we are not left entirely to speculation, for a passage in Arrian's "Indica" (c. 7) places the identity of Gisanê and Krishna beyond question. Arrian, quoting Megasthenes, says that Dionysos "instructed the Indians to let their hair grow long in honour of the god"; therefore Dionysos is Gisanê, and Gisanê must be Krishna.

Krishna's hair was braided. Both Gisanê and these Indians had long, and as Avdall puts it, braided hair: it was their sacred and especial mark. The Rajputs are the only clans of Northern India who have always made long hair their boast, and cultivated it as sacred. The Tamils wear long hair; so did certain ascetics; and the Sikhs do the

same. But the Sikhs are mostly of Jat origin, akin to and imitators of the Rajputs. And the residue of the Tamils who dwelt in the Indus Valley has been long ago absorbed and Hinduised. Colonel Tod has some wonderful speculations on the westward migrations of the Yadavas in pre-Christian times. He would probably recognise in these Armenian Indians some connection of the Yadavas, for the Yadavas dwelt on the lower Indus, and were the fellow-countrymen and worshippers of Krishna. But whether they were Yadavas or not, I think we may conclude with considerable probability that the Armenian Indians came of the same aboriginal stock from which many of the western Rajput clans were subsequently developed.

Apart, however, from these speculative conclusions, we gather three interesting facts. First, Gisanê, Krishna, and Dionysos are three interchangeable names of the same deity. Second, the statues of Demetr and Gisanê are among the earliest Indian idols of which we have any detailed account. And they are not Brahmanical. Thirdly, although the westward migration of these Indians cannot have been the first of its kind, it is the earliest we know of. Such migrations have been comparatively rare, but the gypsies, and the 200,000 Indians carried captive by Timur to Samarkand are other instances in point. On the whole we have to thank Zenob for having preserved an interesting little bit of history.